

Message to the Congress Reporting on Environmental Quality April 18, 1991

To the Congress of the United States:

Of all the great social and technological changes of the 20th century, none may be more crucial to our well-being and that of future generations than the change that has occurred in the way we view our environment. Ours was the first generation to see the many colors of Earth from the vastness of space, and to recognize that our decisions will determine whether the next generation lives in a polluted world of lowered expectations or in a world that sustains humanity and a wondrous diversity of life.

Given these high stakes, I am pleased to report that 1990 was a landmark year in the Nation's efforts to enhance environmental quality.

- We enacted the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, providing the United States with the world's most advanced, comprehensive, and market-oriented laws to address air pollution, including acid precipitation, urban air quality, toxic air pollutants, and global ozone layer depletion.
- We adopted an international agreement and enacted laws to phase out chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and other substances that deplete the Earth's ozone layer, which protects us from the harmful effects of solar radiation.
- We enacted the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 and adopted a major international agreement to strengthen laws related to oil pollution prevention, liability, and response.
- We enacted the most environmentally progressive farm bill ever. It will help farmers protect water quality and wildlife habitat and it launches a part of our America the Beautiful initiative to begin a long-term national tree planting and improvement campaign aimed at both rural and urban areas.
- In partnership with the Nation's Governors, we developed ambitious national educational goals, while the Congress and the executive branch strengthened environmental education

programs. These actions are an essential part of our efforts to revitalize American education and to improve the environment.

- We made other commitments to environmental stewardship, including the expansion of national parks, wildlife refuges, marine sanctuaries, and recreation areas; accelerated cleanup of Federal facilities; enhanced protection of marine mammals, the African elephant, the Florida panther, and other threatened species; and the suspension for up to 10 years of oil and gas leasing in many areas off our coastlines pending further environmental and resource analysis.

The complete record is told in this report. I am proud that our Administration played a catalytic and constructive role in securing these achievements. Progress has come from working cooperatively with the Congress, State and local governments, environmental and conservation groups, corporations, educators, and scores of individuals, as well as other nations and international institutions.

Our achievements in 1990 add to a growing national record of environmental action that has improved the quality of American life. Compared to the conditions facing Americans earlier in my lifetime, our skies are clearer, our lakes and streams are cleaner, and our major technologies are less wasteful.

Our work, however, is incomplete. Americans are sobered by the scope of the stewardship challenge and recognize that it requires ongoing vigilance and action. We know, for example, that increased trade and economic development is needed to reduce poverty and improve the quality of life for all of the world's people. However, if we fail to make wise economic and environmental choices, those needed increases in economic activity are likely to result in new burdens on the Earth's ability to sustain life. Our challenge is both to provide greater opportunities for an expanding population

and to protect the environment upon which we depend.

Several forces work in our favor. Our economy is fundamentally sound, which allows us to make environmental investments and serve as a model for others. Our technology is first-rate, as is our research establishment. Our citizens are eager to make a personal contribution.

In the days ahead, therefore, we must summon the full measure of our powers to achieve environmental results. In that effort we should be guided by what science tells us about the most serious threats to our health and environment, and also by our knowledge of what works and what does not.

In particular, we must learn to harness wherever possible the power of the marketplace in service to the environment. The goal of a healthy environment may not be provided by markets acting alone. However, government regulations are blunt tools that impose unforeseen human costs. Therefore, we need to consider all costs and benefits of government programs as they are developed and expand the use of market incentives that deliver results at the lowest possible cost to society. As a corollary, we need to strengthen the base of scientific and economic understanding that supports such decisions.

Our environmental efforts should also be guided by a holistic view. The environment is composed of a seamless web of relationships between living organisms and the air, water, and land that surround them. Accordingly, rather than continue to address environmental issues in isolation from each other or from other social goals, we must expand our efforts to understand and protect the functional integrity of the environment—and our place in it.

We can also apply American ingenuity to the challenge of preventing pollution. There is no reason to think of pollution as an inevitable problem that occurs at the end of a pipe. Quite the contrary: as pollution becomes more costly, and because we recognize the environment is an enclosed sphere, we are finding that pollution prevention can be less costly *and* better for the environment.

Our efforts to enhance the quality of the

domestic environment must be accompanied by comparable efforts toward global environmental quality. In these times, Americans are aware that our political and economic security is affected by actions occurring abroad. Likewise, we know that environmental threats do not stop at a line on a map. In the months and years ahead, we need to broaden our dialogue with other nations and international institutions and together address environmental issues that know no boundaries.

At home, two further principles will guide our environmental policies. First, we will continue to harness the enthusiasm and expertise of citizen volunteers. Partnerships between the public and private sectors have always been a key to our success, and their value in environmental affairs is growing. Second, we will continue to enforce environmental laws firmly and fairly. Our record and our message in this regard are absolutely clear: polluters must pay.

Taken together, these principles—and the new programs and initiatives that are putting them into action—represent a turning point in American environmental affairs. No longer should we as a nation focus on isolated fragments of what is in fact a complex, interconnected set of problems. Nor should we accept rigid, shortsighted measures that stymie innovation, shift pollution from one location to another, or impose unnecessary costs. In the future, our national environmental strategy must be comprehensive, long-range, efficient, and adaptable to changing information about risks and benefits.

In the coming months, our Administration will pursue a number of new initiatives to advance these principles. For example, in December 1990 I established by Executive order the President's Commission on Environmental Quality. This Commission will soon be at work building public-private partnerships to help achieve concrete results in the areas of pollution prevention, conservation, education, and international cooperation. A program of Presidential awards for achievement in conservation and environmental affairs will stimulate voluntary activity and recognize the outstanding efforts of individuals and organizations.

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Each of these projects is intended to underscore my belief that environmental stewardship must flow from action by all Americans, not just from government action.

In the legislative arena, our Administration will work with the 102nd Congress toward enactment of amendments to the Clean Water Act and other laws, seeking opportunities to incorporate innovative, market-oriented provisions. We will also seek to make progress toward the goal of no-net-loss of wetlands and to strengthen programs to revitalize the Great Lakes, the Chesapeake Bay, and other productive ecosystems. And we will work for a National Energy Strategy that provides a balance among the goals of increased energy efficiency, increased use of alternative fuels, and environmentally responsible development of all U.S. energy resources.

I have proposed that the Congress give the environment a permanent place at the Cabinet table by creating a Department of the Environment. Given the importance of environmental matters, both domestically and internationally, the Environmental Protection Agency is already accorded equal status with other major Federal departments in my Administration. However, I feel this policy should be established in law for the future. The Congress should reject extraneous provisions that would delay consideration of this proposal.

Looking abroad, the United States will continue to seek to conclude an international convention on global climate change in time for its signing at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil. In our view, such a convention must be comprehensive in scope, addressing all sources and sinks of greenhouse gases, adaptation as well as mitigation measures, and continued scientific and economic research and policy responses. The United States is committed to a series of domestic actions that have many benefits such as curbing air pollution, conserving energy, and restoring forest lands and that also help to curb greenhouse gas levels. These actions—recently established in law or proposed by my Administration—will hold U.S. net emissions

of greenhouse gases at or below the 1987 level through the foreseeable future. An effective response to potential climate change also requires that all nations participate and meet obligations that are appropriate to their circumstances.

I have also proposed that a worldwide convention on forests be developed and ready for signing by world leaders at the U.N. conference in 1992. Forests provide diverse benefits, helping to clean our air and water, foster biological diversity, and sequester greenhouse gases. We should take steps now to protect and enhance them. In the coming year, I also hope we can move forward on U.S. proposals for integrated economic and environmental assistance in such regions as Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern and Central Europe, and the Middle East.

The worldwide market potentially available for U.S. exports of environmental goods and services approaches \$60 billion annually, and it is growing. I have directed the Department of Commerce to assess that market, and I look forward to the creation of a partnership between business and government to develop the opportunities for environmental technology exports. This effort will help to create new jobs while enhancing the quality of life here at home and around the globe.

The causes and effects of environmental problems are diverse and complex. We should be humbled by the fact that the more we learn, the more questions arise. But unlike the situation a generation ago, we know today that ecological degradation can be halted and, indeed, reversed through rigorous analysis, constructive dialogue, and hard work. Let us work together in this generation to achieve a more productive harmony between humanity and the environment.

GEORGE BUSH

The White House,
April 18, 1991.